Black History Month 2022: Xbox Ambassadors Share Their Stories

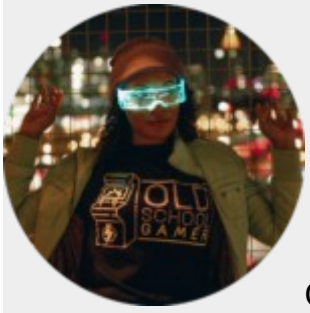
Community Fifthpaw Feb 1, 2022

Hey, happy Black History Month! The Xbox Ambassadors program has always been about highlighting and amplifying voices within our wonderful community. So, in celebration, we asked those who identify as Black/African American how games with diverse representation have impacted them and to share their own stories about being a member of a gaming community.

We received hundreds of responses and, with much consideration, selected the following to share.

Here are their stories in their own words:

Dreness28



Gaming has been such a huge component of my life since I was eight years old. I remember playing videos games like Mortal Kombat, King’s Quest VI, and Golden Eye with my brothers as we were growing up; those are moments I forever cherish. Back then, playable Black characters were not as prevalent as they are now, and it is refreshing to see how the gaming experience has changed drastically over the years.

The very first time I loaded up Knights of the Old Republic and saw that I could make a Black hero (or villain depending on if you decided that the Sith Code was your way of your life), I was so incredibly stoked to have that experience.

This was an important moment because it was not until I created that character did I completely comprehend that we, as Black individuals, could fully exist in all types of genres, from fantasy to science-fiction. With the advancement of graphic designs, it is important for me to see developers not only creating characters with diverse ethnicities but actually taking the time to create fully fleshed out character features.

For example, in games like Mass effect or Dragon Age you can customize your character down to eye shape, mouth or nose size, skin color and texture. However, as spectacular as the character design system was, it had the issue of the Black characters created still having “European” type of features with a darker skin tone. As the games progressed, more and more options were provided, and I could design a fully fleshed out Black character that felt like me! Seeing this representation helped me fully engage and immerse in the story of the game and overall provided a way for me to connect with the story the developer is trying to tell.

For the future of gaming, I hope to see continued representation and diverse story telling for Black characters with these characters being the main protagonists of the story! Representation matters: that moment I experienced with my KOTOR character creation spurred life-long commitment to being vocal about the necessity of diversity, especially in gaming spaces.

This past year, I started the journey of Twitch streaming and became an affiliate within a few weeks of joining the community. The rapidity of my growth is due in no small part to making some crucial friendships in the Black gaming community. Some of the first twitch gaming friends I made happened due to a random hashtag I used in one of my Instagram posts: #blackgamer.

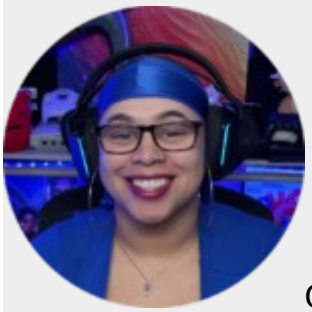
From that moment, I was invited to be a part of a streaming collaboration group called the Black Creators Society. The members of that team have supported me and helped in growing my presence on Twitch. They have provided a safe space to express ideas, collaborate for content creation, and help each other slowly make waves in the black gaming community.

Seeing others like me be a part of this gaming/content creation journey is so inspirational and has led me to find other large Black streamers that I would not have known about otherwise (due the algorithms on the major social media apps). It helps me see that I can achieve my goals and eventually get

to a place where I can have a voice for change in the larger/global gaming community.

Having a community like this to help me navigate the world of gaming is so important to me because there are, unfortunately, still some toxic (i.e racist) experiences that do occur. Knowing that my friends have my back, and will stick up for me if needed, has given me a sense of peace and allows me to occupy the gaming space unapologetically!

Autumnizhurr



Games that feature Black characters have impacted me in a way that allows me to see myself in a positive light. Every time I see a new Black character in my games, I am hopeful. It shows me that Black people are going into the gaming world and changing what is considered normal. Fortnite is one of, if not, my favorite game and they are excellent with representation.

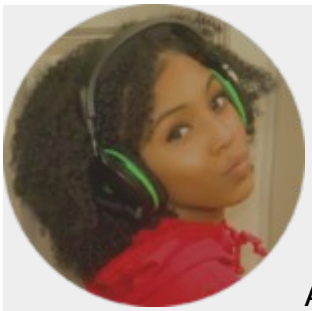
They released a skin name Joy who is a Black woman with roller-skates and vitiligo.

1. Skating is a major activity for many Black people.
2. Vitiligo isn't always represented in a good way.

So once I saw Joy in the item shop, I bought the skin almost immediately and was overwhelmed with joy (heh) seeing a Black Woman in my FAVORITE Game! I played using that skin for a month straight. Who doesn't love a little Joy?!

I am part of an amazing community called Black Girl Gamers. They have helped me stay connected to my passion for gaming when I ran into common issues with being a Black girl gamer. I am able to remember that this gaming space is for everyone and that includes US. By being with this gaming community, I have opportunities that are normally hidden from gamers like myself. I can constantly and consistently see myself in this gaming world. All because of BGG. All in all, gaming communities have made gaming fun for a Girl Gamer like myself!

selenadeon5x



As the years progress, we consistently see just how valued representation is and how much everlasting impact it can have on those represented communities. Being a Black woman in the growing community of gaming and streaming, I have begun to see shifts in the creative world that highlight just how immaculate we truly are! From new-age games with strong female leads like Apex Legends that feature Bangalore and Lifeline to classics like Street Fighter III that featured the first Black female fighter named Elena.

Customizable games like The Sims and all its series have made more inclusive options by developing hairstyles, clothes, and skin tone variations of which represent the marginalized players who can often be overshadowed. Just these few examples of the consideration given from the gaming industry have taken people like me into consideration and we truly appreciate it. The sheer joy of knowing that we are heard and considered whenever we launch a game and see the representation is enough for me. Keeps me coming back every time!

I have been impacted by the gaming community since 1998. My mother gifted me my first handheld which was a purple Game Boy Color which I still have and play to this day. Seeing how the quality, rigorousness, and growth of companies have changed has kept me always excited for the next adventure. This has led to me networking and befriending other gamers online, the occasional cosplay, and now my latest venture with streaming. Wouldn’t have ever assumed 20 years ago that gaming would be as big and prominent as it is currently.

LadyInfamous415

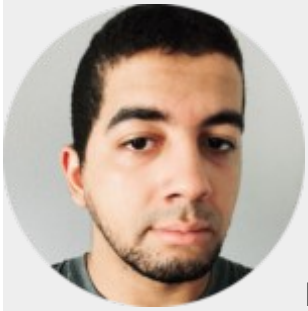
Games featuring Black/African American characters have impacted me more than you know. As an Afro-Latina growing up playing video games, there weren’t really any characters I could relate to. There

wasn’t someone that looked like me with a story or a world to go in to and explore. So, I appreciate when video game developers make the effort to input more Black/African American characters in their games. This is a step in the right direction, because everyone has a story to tell. My favorite example must be Sheva Alomar from Resident Evil 5.

She was the first one that I saw in a video game who was a co-lead. So every chance I had I would play her. It was exciting because there she was, a Black woman in a video game in a major role! It was also scary because, you know… it’s Resident Evil.

Gaming communities, be it big or small, are important and can be impactful to gamers. They should be informative, welcoming and encouraging us be better gamers and to also be kinder to one another. To be able to hash out differences in a respectful manner. To lift each other up. Gaming communities showed me not only how to be a better gamer, but be an overall better person.

TheJdog1997

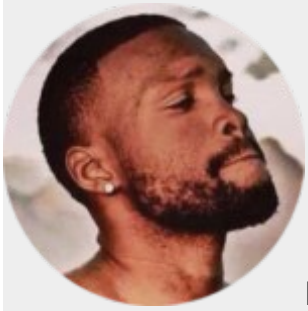


Black/African American characters in games have impacted me just by me being able to relate to them, especially when their stories have a somewhat similar situation to the real world. Be it good or bad, I remember the lessons that these characters have taught me so that I can think of better ways to resolve these issues.

One of the games that I play daily since the beginning is Destiny 2 and I play a Warlock. I was happy to see the leader of the Warlock vanguard named Ikora be a powerful Black woman. I was also excited by the fact that current and future gamers will see Ikora as an inspiration and maybe even a role model for all of us Black/African Americans!

Some days I see a lot of hate towards the Black gamer community from many gamers who just don’t accept me. Hearing and seeing all that hate is one of the reasons why for a while, I never played with others, and I’d just go solo on everything. But as time went by, I met a lot of other gaming communities that do accept me for who I am. Members of those communities have helped me feel more comfortable with gaming with other players, whether it’s missions or raids. Instead of hate, they showed me their love, support, and positivity, and that’s what I love about these communities.

C Diesel 2A

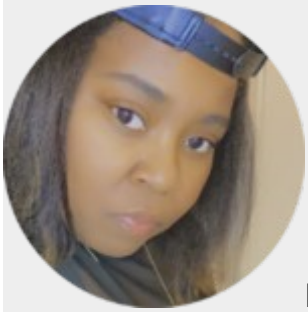


Being born in the 80s you didn’t see a lot of Black video game main characters or side characters outside of sports games. Don’t get me wrong; that was amazing because I do remember a time growing up there were no dark skin players in Madden or Tecmo bowl. I believe inclusion matters and seeing Black athletes on tv and in video games made me aspire be a professional athlete. I have been playing video games since I was 3 years old and outside of sports games, I didn’t see a lot of black characters, that is until Final Fantasy 7.

I have always been interested in RPGs. When I saw that it had a black character, I was sooo excited to play as Barret Wallace. Adding a black character might not seem like a big deal, but to me as a child it was. I could play as someone that looked like me in a genre where there wasn’t a lot of characters that did. It was a big deal to me because it opened my imagination to me being able to be like Barret Wallace, where before I was only thinking I could be like Michael Jordan or Bo Jackson.

Me and some of my closest lifelong friends had spent hours playing games and bonding at the same time. I have also met some amazing people through online gaming who I will be friends with for life. With the pandemic and all the things that have been going on in the United States over the past couple of years, gaming has helped me get through. I can just get lost in another world for a couple of hours to help take my mind off some of the craziness going on in my world. The gaming community is also a place I can turn to for different perspectives and give my perspective on things going on.

Quaya Breezy

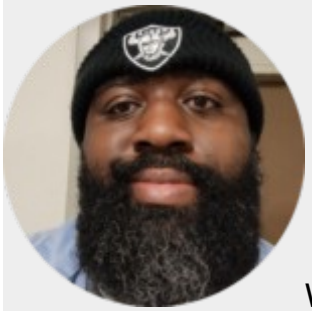


In the past there have not been a lot of Black leading characters in movies and games but when there are, it helps us feel

included. Everyone wants to see someone who reflects them in a sense, so when there are games featuring Black characters, it broadens the audience feelings of inclusiveness. Whether it's Call of Duty, GTA, Fortnite, etc, being able to select a character that reflects you is an amazing feeling. I hope that all games incorporate characters from every race and ethnicity so that every gamer can feel a sense of inclusiveness while playing with characters that reflect them.

Gaming communities such as the Xbox community have impacted my experience a lot. Being a Black gamer, especially being a female Black gamer, I did not really have people to play with. Being that the people directly around me didn't play or assumed that girls cannot play. Gaming communities have helped me find other girl and African American gamers to play with. These communities allow me to connect with people from all around the world and allows us to come together and do the things we both love despite our background. It's a community of friends all doing what brings them joy. Without the Xbox gaming community I probably wouldn't be who I am today.

Thelegendgr8n3s

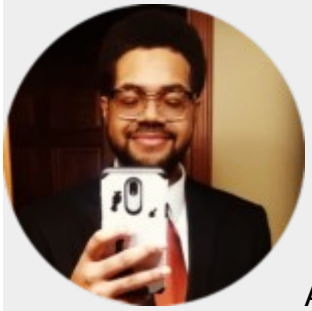


While they are still too few and far between, there is one Black character that did affect me greatly. I barely played Prototype but almost got every achievement in the second game because the main character was Black. The first season of the The Walking Dead game I played because Lee was Black and was very affected by the ending. My favorite character in Final Fantasy 13 was Sazh, because out of everyone in the party he felt the most vulnerable and normal also he had a son he was trying to save (I have a son in real life).

Also, if a game has any type of character creation, I always try to make them look like myself or another Black man from either real life or fiction. But by far my favorite character has always been Cyborg from Teen Titans. He was just like me. Big, tall, older brother type, played sports, into tech, played games… he just happened to also be a superhero. So, when Injustice came out and the original voice actor reprised his role I was all over that! I'm not the best at fighting games but Cyborg will always be my main as long as that game is a series. It meant a lot to me growing up that a comic book character was just like me. He has been my favorite character ever since and a big reason why I love comics today.

I run a Destiny 2 clan with a few buddies that I met while playing it. We talk about all sorts of things in and out of the game. We are from all parts of the world, some of us here in California or Virginia or Florida and others from Canada and Great Britain. It’s amazing that one game brought us all together.

INCOGNITO RIVAL

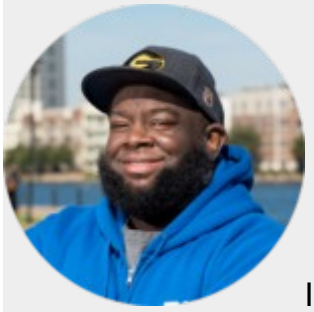


As the years have gone by, I have seen more Black actors and characters in leading roles and/or having some sort of important role in a game. One of my favorite game series, Battlefield, showed me something that I have not seen in gaming before. In Battlefield 5, there is a story mode about the Senegalese Tirailleurs, who fought during World War 2 and made a big impact during the war when taking over a major Nazi stronghold that turned the fight in favor of the allies.

I love reading about historical stories like these, but I love it even more that the creators were able to find information in history that is not normally taught or was purposefully hidden. For them to uncover this and tell me about it made me gain lots of respect for the creators.

Gaming communities have impacted me in good and bad ways. The good is finding players who respect other players, their skills and learn from them and just being friendly to one another at the end of the day. However, in the times we live in right now, with all the crazy stuff happening, I have experienced a lot of racism towards me and others. We must learn to live together and, just like in the gaming world, we must learn to play together!

DDS618



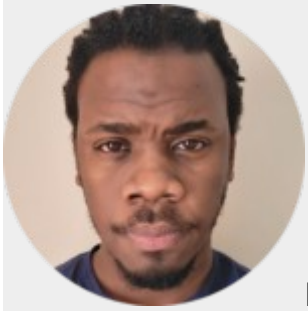
It’s always cool to see characters that look like me in video games. Growing up, there were few Black characters, so I never really saw myself in the stories. But once I saw Barret in Final Fantasy 7, I started

seeing myself more in games. That was my first game I played where the Black character wasn’t just an athlete.

Then, I got a chance to see myself in Cole Train. Gears of War has a fond memory in my heart, because it was the first major Xbox game I’d ever beaten. It was also something to be able to see myself in a story like that, and to see myself in a major game series by a console’s company. Cole Train will always have a fond memory in my heart, as well as Gears of War.

Gaming communities have impacted me in so many ways. It’s something to have a bunch of people who like some of the same games as you. It’s also pretty cool to have people who don’t like the same games as you, so we have different perspectives. But those communities help me enjoy games and enhance my experiences as we discuss our theories on what the future holds for certain games.

Spartanite3



Little Jacob. Lifeline. Alyx Vance. Being Jamaican, the first time I heard Lifeline’s (not so accurate) accent, I was shocked because to me it meant my culture was growing across different media; not just in music collaborations but also on gaming platforms. GTA IV also had a feature “Jamaican Heat” and featured songs from the island. To keep it short, unless a scifi or fantasy-based game is preferred, we tend to enjoy bits of familiarity from our culture, whether it is in the form of Easter eggs, maps based on our hometown/cities or our favourite actors.

Having our culture depicted (correctly) is always a plus because experiencing other cultures (not just my own) promotes understanding and a sense of comradery. Which in turn will strengthen our gaming community and foster unity in our individual lives.

While there will always be a few people with different thought processes that can be perceived negatively within these gaming communities, It provides a chance for growth and platform to meet like-minded groups and nothing feels more satisfying than winning/accomplishing an objective as a team.

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Thank you to everyone for sharing their stories this Black History Month! It’s not always easy to share personal experiences publicly. We really appreciate everyone taking the time to submit their wonderful stories.